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ABSTRACT

In the 1960's Max Rafferty, a conservative California teacher, principal, and superintendent of public instruction, expressed many ideas which the New Right has been able to put into effect in the 1980's. The influence of political and religious conservatives is seen in movements for public school prayer; advancing private over public education through the use of vouchers, tuition tax credits, and Christian academies; censorship of school textbooks, public library books, and other media; opposition to sex education; opposition to busing to achieve school desegregation; opposition to public school financing through bond issues; and support from the Reagan administration. In the curriculum, this movement has promoted anti-evolution creation science and opposed what it considers to be secular humanism. Rafferty was instrumental in the development of many of these ideas. He began his career in small, southern California desert towns and gained national exposure through reprints of a 1961 speech attacking progressive education. During his terms as state school superintendent he was thwarted in implementing many of his ideas by local control of schools. After losing an election for the United States Senate he became Education Dean at Troy State University in Alabama. He died in 1982. (Author/IS)

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ROOTS OF THE NEW RIGHT:

SCHOOL CRITIC MAX RAFFERTY (1917-82)

by
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Summary

Examines Max Rafferty (1917-82), California conservative educator and school critic of the 1960s, as precursor to the New Right's apparent successes in the 1980s. The influence of the religious and political conservatives is seen in movements for public school prayer; advancing private over public education through vouchers, tuition tax credits, and Christian academies; censorship of school textbooks and public library books and other media; opposition to sex education and busing to achieve school desegregation; and opposition to public school financing through bond issues. Prominently mentioned are the New Right anti-evolution "creation science" campaigns and the indiscriminate labeling as "secular humanism" of many trends distasteful to the New Right. Rafferty in the 1960s verbalized many conservative ideas which the New Right has been able to put into effect in the 1980s to change U.S. schools and society. Examines New Right's power bases: TV evangelistic media use for fundraising, religio-political organizations (Moral Majority), and backing from the Reagan administration and federal agencies (U.S. Education Department).

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Roots of the New Right: School Critic Max Rafferty (1917-82)

By Franklin Parker

Max Rafferty criticized progressive educators and their federal backers in the 1960s with limited success. That same battle in the 1980s is being won by the New Right coalition of religious fundamentalists, political rightists, and TV evangelists who spearheaded the Moral Majority. Backed by the White House and the U.S. Education Department--and apparently by the voting majority--the New Right is reshaping American schools and society.

As teacher, principal, California state school superintendent, and critic-writer Rafferty attracted perhaps more popular attention than did the more academic Arthur E. Bestor, prestigious James B. Conant, and caustic Admiral Hyman G. Rickover. Though Rafferty's impact in his time was minor, in a sense he presaged the New Right's current surge of influence and power. It helps to trace Rafferty's emergence as a school critic in the '60s and to ponder the New Right's apparent success in achieving what Rafferty only verbalized.

He was born Maxwell Lewis Rafferty, Jr., May 17, 1917, in New Orleans, unaware of the Darwinian evolution debate, which cast doubt on divine creation, or the widely church-distributed Fundamentals pamphlet series, 1910-15, affirming Bible inerrancy and Christ's divinity, virgin birth, absolution for man's sins, resurrection, and second coming. By the time his family moved

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to Sioux City, Iowa (1921), where his father owned a paint and wallpaper store, that Fundamentals series had helped inspire the 1920s Prohibition and opposition to evolution teaching. The Rafferty store failed in 1931 and the family moved to Los Angeles, where the father worked in an auto plant. This was six years after the 1925 Scopes "monkey" trial, Dayton, Tenn., which fundamentalists largely won (evolution teaching was legally prohibited in Tennessee schools for some 40 years).

Max stood out at Beverly Hills High School for his bookishness--his Baptist mother of colonial background taught him to read when he was 3; his debating skills--a glibness inherited from his Irish Roman Catholic father; and his youthfulness--he skipped several grades and completed high school at age 16.

At the University of California, Los Angeles, with a history major and English minor, he managed the football and rugby teams, was president of Sigma Pi fraternity, and joined the UCLA Americans, an anti-Communist athletic group formed to oppose leftist students, many of whom were concerned about fascism abroad and at home.

He earned the B.A. degree in 1938. With jobs scarce, he worked in a gas station for a few months until he became ill. Recovering and deciding to become a teacher, he studied at UCLA School of Education where, he said later, he reluctantly absorbed John Dewey's progressive philosophy: "I had no choice.... It was the only way I could get a credential. I became a grade A, number one hypocrite."

He taught English, history, and coached football at Trona High School, in a small, arid town near the Mojave Desert, 1940-48,

barely avoiding being drafted. After occupational deferment as a teacher, he was classified 1A, passed his physical but appealed, claiming flat feet; his appeal was denied. His first wife (he married a schoolmate in December 1940; was divorced in 1943; and in 1944 married Frances Louella Longman, mother of their two daughters and one son) in a later interview said:

> He had been in the ROTC at UCLA and said that he hadn't liked it at all. He told me he hoped his flat feet would keep him out of the service, and he said if that didn't work, it would be easy to have an accident and shoot a toe off.

At induction, he insisted on re-examination and finally got a 4F deferment.

From Tarona, where he had risen to vice principal, he became principal of Big Bear Senior High School, 1948-51, a resort town in the San Bernardino mountains. He moved on to become Superintendent, Saticoy Elementary School District, 1951-55; Superintendent, Needles Elementary and High School District, 1955-61 (where he restored order successfully after progressive education was thrown out and mass resignations ensued); and Superintendent, La Canada Schools, a prosperous northeast Los Angeles suburb, 1961-62.

Asked later why he had spent his first 21 years as teacher and administrator in isolated southern California desert towns, he grinned and said, "For a very simple reason. They paid better salaries. And advancement was far more rapid." Meanwhile, attending UCLA nights and summers, he earned the M.A. (1949) and Ed.D. (1956) degrees, wrote critical articles in Phi Delta Kappan, and

gave equally critical talks on schools to Rotary Clubs and other groups, none of which caused a stir.

He later recalled why his first La Canada school board meeting speech, "The Passing of the Patriot," spring, 1961, was a blockbuster:

> The rise of the John Birch Society--which I had never heard of till I came to the Los Angeles area--and other pro-American groups had created a tinderbox and I unwittingly dropped a lightning bolt in the middle of it.

He blamed educators since the 1930s for being "so busy educating for 'life adjustment' that we forgot that the first duty of a nation's schools is to preserve the nation...." He continued:

> The results [of our system of public education] are plain for all to see: The worst of our youngsters growing up to become booted, side-burned, ducktailed, unwashed, leather-jacketed slobs, whose favorite sport is ravaging little girls and stomping polio victims to death; youth coming into maturity for all the world like the best of our young people fresh from a dizzying roller coaster ride, with everything blurred, with nothing clear, with no positive standards, with everything in doubt. No wonder so many of them welsh out and squeal and turn traitor when confronted with the grim reality of Red military force and the crafty cunning of Red psychological warfare.

He reflected super-patriots' disdain of American soldiers turned traitor under communist brainwashing in the Korean War. He urged his

audience to dedicate themselves to returning patriotism to education, to the end of making:

> our young people informed and disciplined and alert--militant for freedom, clear-eyed to the filthy menace of Communist corruption... [and] happy in their love of country.

The inflammatory speech, widely distributed by right-wing groups, appeared in the Congressional Record, was reprinted in dozens of U.S. newspapers and in the Reader's Digest. National attention, wrote a New York Times newsman, made Rafferty the idol of the crackpot right and others who yearn for the simple and manly virtues of yesterday.

Booked now into right-wing rallies in the state, Rafferty was seen by Republican leaders as a likely winner of the normally nonpartisan post of superintendent of public instruction. Assured of financial backing, he ran against Ralph Richardson, UCLA speech professor, who was supported by teachers' organizations. Backed by the American Legion and other ultraconservatives, Rafferty touched grass-roots concerns by telling people their children were growing up absurd. He won by 219,844 votes. Richardson recalled: "He clubbed me to death with the progressive education issue, even though progressive education had not been used in California in ten years." In 1966 he was re-elected state school superintendent by an unprecedented 3 million votes.

Rafferty had little influence on California's check and balance school system, where policy was made locally. State decisions were made by a governor-appointed ten-member school board. Teachers and

administrators were state civil servants. Rafferty contantly feuded with the school board, nine of whom had publicly endorsed his opponent in the 1962 election (after 1966, Governor Reagan appointed six rightist members). Rafferty clashed with school board president Thomas W. Braden over The Dictionary of American Slang, which he characterized as a "practicing handbook of sexual perversion." He challenged an eighth grade textbook, Land of the Free, making its adoption a minor cause celebre, because it presented the accomplishments of minority groups, inferred that the U.S. became a colonial power on taking over the Philippines, stated that Japan was thinking of surrender when the atomic bomb was dropped, and suggested that Joe McCarthy may have misused his senatorial power. He condemned the U.S. Supreme Court for its 1961 anti-public school prayer decision. He attacked the appointment of Eldridge Cleaver as guest lecturer at the University of California, Berkeley. He savored these emotion-packed, newsmaking rows.

In his 1962 campaign Rafferty urged an end to progressive education as official policy, recommended lists of children's classics sent to all public schools, and adoption of music books containing patriotic songs: Columbia the Gem of the Ocean, You're a Grand Old Flag, and Yankee Doodle. He urged that teacher education be shifted from university schools of education to liberal arts and science departments, stressed subject matter over teaching methods, wanted public education extended to the mentally retarded and compensatory education for dropouts, urged more state aid for local schools, and promoted economy in school consolidation. A reporter commented:

> There is no evidence that Rafferty cared very deeply about such issues, but they were useful to him as political steps to higher office. When he announced for the Senate--appropriately on Washington's birthday--some Californians may have been surprised, but the record should have prepared them. And the time was ripe.

Rafferty then set out to capture moderate Republican Thomas H. Kuchel's U.S. Senate seat. Kuchel, known enemy to the far right, had denounced the John Birch Society for attacking Chief Justice Earl Warren (who, as governor, had appointed Kuchel to the Senate in 1953). Rafferty's three reasons for entering the Senate race:

> One, as a Republican, I felt my opponent wasn't in the mainstream of the Republican party. Two, as an educator, I was appalled by the waste of Federal money and the ratholes down which it was being poured. Three, as a father whose only son is in the Air Force and is scheduled to go to Vietnam, I knew we had to clean up that mess somehow.

Rafferty defeated Kuchel in the primary by 66,635 votes, campaigning against violence, pornography, drugs, and lawlessness. In the general election against liberal Democrat Alan M. Cranston, former California comptroller, Rafferty stressed law and order, condemned liberal Supreme Court decisions as contributing to social disorder, characterized Court members as "political hacks, ideological reformers, and poker playing cronies of the President [L.B. Johnson], and child marrying mountain climbers" [William O. Douglas].

Newsweek reported Rafferty's solution for America's problems as:

> Shooting looters, summary street courts-martial for other rioters, more capital punishment, abolishing most foreign aid, and escalating the Vietnam war (perhaps with nuclear weapons).

Qualifying these early rash statements later in the campaign, he told a reporter he favored "minimum force" necessary to enforce the law, and shooting only "as a last resort." He mellowed too on ghetto dwellers, Vietnam, foreign aid, and other issues. Still, on November 5, 1968, he lost to Cranston the U.S. Senate seat he so prized. He also lost his 1970 re-election bid for a third term as California's superintendent of public instruction to Wilson Riles, black educator he had appointed his deputy.

Defeated all around, Rafferty left California where, unknown, he had risen dramatically to statewide recognition and national attention. He settled in as Education Dean, Troy State University, Alabama, 1971, just before fundamentalists' partial victory, 1972, in having "creation science" (based on Genesis) given equal time whenever evolution was taught in California public schools. From his Alabama post, he observed growing New Right victories: protest against alleged obscene textbooks, Kanawha County schools, West Virginia, 1974-75; conservative attack, 1975, on the National Science Foundation-financed social studies course, "Man: A Course of Study," for allegedly teaching fifth and sixth graders, through an Eskimo unit, about killing girl babies and old people, wife-swapping, and incest; TV evangelists' phenomenal rise to wealth and power, 1970s, leading to the 1979 founding of the Moral Majority, under the Rev. Jerry

Falwell; and passage of equal time evolution/creation science teaching laws in Arkansas and Louisiana, 1981 (a federal district court, 1982, declared the state laws unconstitutional).

Rafferty's accidental death occurred Sunday, June 13, 1982, after his car skidded off the road, went over an earthen dam, and plunged into 15 feet of water. Trapped for nearly 10 minutes but revived by paramedics, he died on the way to the hospital, aged 65. It was a sad end for one who had in some measure prepared and presaged the New Right's ascendancy to power.

Joe L. Kincheloe sees the Kanawha County (WV) textbook controversy, 1974-75, as the catalyst that coalesced the New Right and convinced them that most American parents were on their side. Led by school board member Alice Moore, local parents won anew their right to eliminate undesirable school textbooks and to reject school and society permissiveness that Rafferty had railed against: "Saint" John Dewey and his progressive education followers; the beatnicks, drug takers, pornography, and runaway children of the 1964 Free Speech movement; the rioters, vandals, and black ghetto burners of the mid '60s; the mounting crime, muggings, and killings of that protest period; the draft card burners, flag defilers, and university smashers of the Vietnam era. In West Virginia the New Right found that they could use TV to their advantage; that grass-roots America wanted to refurbish the American dream, return to old-time values, and reinstate patriotism, morality, and the three Rs in the nation's schools.

The New Right's seeming success is frightening. The Ronald Reagan revolution has cut back big government, scaled down federal

agencies, transferred socio-economic-educational problems to states, reversed fifty years of federal aid to distressed citizens unable to help themselves.

Even before A Nation at Risk, 1983, and other critical reports, educational conservatism advanced nationally: school prayer, vouchers, tuition tax credit, Christian academies, media censorship, teaching children at home rather than in public schools, opposing busing for school desegregation, fighting school bonds, and others.

The New Right uses the undefined "secular humanism" (man centered rather than God centered) to attack everything they oppose--from atheism to the United Nations, from sex education to evolution teaching. Anti-secular humanism is now part of the Education for Economic Security Act of 1985, which bars use of federal magnet school funds "for any course of instruction the substance of which is secular humanism." U.S. Education Secretary William J. Bennett, New Right-approved appointee, lets local authorities define "secular humanism," an impreciseness the New Right likes because the undefined term is a convenient weapon against anything they abhor in public schools.

Rafferty, less an ideologue than a conservative opportunist, would be amazed (perhaps dismayed) at the New Right's rapid success. This country normally has cycles. Time will show how deep and lasting present conservatism will be in American schools and society.

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